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AUTHOR	Boutwell, Richard C.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Must an American Indian become white oriented to succeed in an institution of higher education in today's American society? The purpose of this paper was to lend insight into this question by examining the differences in the attitudes and values of American Indians and non-Indians attending a large western university. The premise upon which the authors based their observations was that there was no significant difference between Indians and non-Indians in the value they placed on education, their problems in school, their grade-point averages, their reported absences, and their feelings about racial discrimination. A survey was distributed at random to 110 students from a large, private western university, a university with one of the nation's leading Indian education programs, in order to determine the validity of the authors' premise. The attitude survey indicated that Indians tended to value their education more than non-Indians do, that Indian students were still aware of their background, and that their ties to their home culture were still great. It was concluded that successful Indian students had not become completely white oriented. Results of the survey are presented in the form of percentages in 3 tables--Population Description, Indian and Non-Indian Comparison, and Conditions Affecting Academic Standing. (FF)

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A COMPARISON OF ATTITUDES AND VALUES BETWEEN INDIANS AND NON-INDIANS IN AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Richard C. Boutwell — Bucknell University
William C. Low — Brigham Young University
Kristin Williams — Brigham Young University
Thomas Proffit — Brigham Young University

[1972]

Red apples. That is what they call Indians who have been too totally assimilated into the white man's culture. Must an Indian become "white on the inside" to succeed in an institution of higher education in today s America? The purpose of this paper is to lend insight into this question, examining the differences in the attitudes and values of Indians and non-Indians attending a large Western University.

In the past there have been two significant generalizations about Indians, affecting research on the scholastic success of Indians in the American system of higher education: First, the pressures from families to return home are so strong that they become a detriment to Indian students (McGrath, 1965); second, because of his culture, the Indian will usually withdraw from the competition presented by the more competition-oriented white students. This withdrawal eventually brings about failure (Wollott, 1960). The premise upon which the cited authors base their observations is that there is no significant difference between Indians and non-Indians in the value they place on education, their problems in school, their grade-point averages, their reported absences, and their feelings about racial discrimination.

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In order to determine the validity of these premises, we distributed a survey to a randomly selected group of 110 students from a large private Western university, a university with one of the nation's leading Indian education programs. Sixty-eight percent of those students measured were American Indians, primarily from the western half of the United States. The remaining thirty-two percent were non-Indian university students chosen as an alternate population to which the Indians could be compared. Table 1 provides a population description.

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 2 compares the values and attitudes of Indians and non-Indians. All of the results are reported in percentages; the numbers in parentheses report the non-Indian responses. A statistical procedure known as a t-test was applied to the percentages in order to determine the statistical significance of the differences between the two populations. If there is no statistical difference, then no scientific conclusions can be drawn, though the scores may still prove interesting.

Insert Table 2 about here

The figures of Table 2 reveal significant differences for three of the survey items. First, Indian students relate enjoyment in life with education, while non-Indians do not. Peculiarly, however, the two groups do not significantly differ in their estimation of the value of school training for meeting

real life problems, an idea that would seem to be closely related to one's enjoyment of life.

Second, the reported absences were significantly different, with Indians missing 3.5 more days than non-Indians. From supplemental questions we discovered that these absences were due to choice, not illness. It is important to note here that the grade-point averages for both groups are fairly high and there is no significant difference in their scores.

The third question with significant differences, question six, taken along with the immediately preceding question, reveals an important discrepancy between Indians and non-Indians. Question five seems to indicate that the two groups basically agree in their evaluation of employment discrimination. Question six, however, shows a very significant discrepancy in the evaluation by each group of the discrimination at the university. There are several possible reasons for this disparity in feelings. One is that there may be some real discrimination, but the non-Indians are unaware of it; another is that there may be a good deal of discrimination, but the non-Indians minimize its existence; or the third possibility is that the Indians are hypersensitive to discrimination and emphasize it out of proportion. Whatever the case, Indians and non-Indians view the problem with significant difference.

Table 3 is divided into two sections. Section 1 compares the two groups' estimations of their major and minor problems in pursuing their academic goals. No statistical test was applied here since the percentages themselves are of greatest importance. Overall, the figures from section 1

show Indians with more classroom problems, money problems, and pressure from home. Section 2 of Table 3 does not show a comparison at all, but merely reports the responses of the Indian students to some questions concerning living conditions which have been found to affect academic performance. This section is self-explanatory.

Insert Table 3 about here

What have we learned about the Indian students' values and attitudes from this survey? Have the successful Indian students become "red apples"? Partially. The survey shows that Indians tend to value education even more than the non-Indian students. They have left their hogans, their economically deprived former way of life and are enjoying the fruits of the white man's culture. The white man's education is the key to the white man's affluence. But the differences indicated in the survey show that the Indian students are still aware of their backgrounds, their "Indianness". They are more sensitive to discrimination at the university, indicating that they still "feel" Indian. They feel a greater pressure from home, implying that their ties to their home culture are still great. Moreover, the fact that a good deal more Indian than non-Indian students consider classwork difficulty a problem lends weight to the second of the two generalities mentioned at the beginning of this paper. The Indian seems to feel the competition more keenly than the non-Indian.

Thus successful Indian students have become at least partially assimilated into the non-Indian culture, but they have not become completely white on the inside.

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FOOTNOTE

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TABLE 1

Population Description

Variables	Indians	Non-Indians
Males	40%	51%
Females	60%	49%
Living On Campus	46%	12%
Living Off Campus	54%	88%
Mean Age	20	23

Note.--Answering the questionnaire was voluntary for both groups.

TABLE 2

Indian and Non-Indian Comparison

Variables	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
1. The training received in school does little to meet real life problems.	41 (34)	10 (9)	49 (57)
2. The more education a man has, the more he can enjoy life.	63 (34)*	12 (14)	25 (51)*
3. Grade point average.	2.45 (3.05)		
4. Reported semester absences.	10 (6.5)**		
	Yes		No
5. Do you feel there is discrimination against Indians when they seek employment?	35 (30)		65 (70)
6. Do you feel there is racial discrimination at this university?	48 (14)**		52 (86)

Note.--All numbers in parentheses are non-Indian values.
All figures are in percents.
*$p < .05$
**$p < .01$

TABLE 3

Conditions Affecting Academic Standing

Section 1

Variables	Major Problem	Minor Problem
1. Classwork is too difficult.	15 (0)	32 (14)
2. Money difficulties.	21 (2)	45 (26)
3. Language problem, i.e., reading/writing.	13 (8)	28 (11)
4. Pressure from parents to come home.	9 (0)	21 (0)

Section 2

Variables	Helpful	Made No Difference	Unhelpful
5. Having an Indian for a roommate.	31	48	21
6. School activities.	47	36	17
7. Counseling from Indian office.	42	33	12
8. Having a non-Indian for a roommate.	35	51	14
9. Living on campus.	34	45	21

Note.--All numbers in parintheses are non-Indian values.
All figures are in percents.